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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 10053

E.O. 12065: GDS 12/26/84 (HARRIS, F. ALLEN) OR-P
TAGS: SHUM AR
SUBJ: GOA RESPONSE TO MAJOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEMONSTRATION

(C - ENTIRE TEXT) SUMMARY: IN AN UNPRECEDENTED ACTION ARGENTINE OFFICIALS RECEIVED TWO HUMAN RIGHTS DELEGATIONS INTO THE CASA ROSADA (THE ARGENTINE WHITE HOUSE) ON DECEMBER 22 FROM A GROUP OF 500 TO 1,000 DEMONSTRATORS IN THE PLAZA DE MAYO. CASA ROSADA SPOKESMAN ISSUED SEVERAL PROMISES: FIRST, THAT A CHRISTMAS AMNESTY FOR SEVERAL HUNDRED PEN PRISONERS WOULD BE ANNOUNCED SHORTLY; SECOND, THAT THE NAMES OF THOSE SENTENCED BY MILITARY TRIBUNALS WOULD BE MADE PUBLIC AND THEIR SENTENCES WOULD BE REDUCED BY TWO THIRDS; AND THIRD, THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD PROVIDE A RESPONSE NEXT THURSDAY TO THE SUBMITTED PETITION TO THE CASA ROSADA SEEKING INFORMATION REGARDING THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE MANY DISAPPEARED. END SUMMARY.

1. BETWEEN 500 AND 1,000 HUMAN RIGHTS PROSTESTERS GATHERED IN THE PLAZA DE MAYO ON THE THURSDAY BEFORE CHRISTMAS (12/21). A DELEGATION OF ARGENTINE HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS ORGANIZED BY THE PARMANENT ASSEMBLY FOR HUMAN RIGHTS WERE ADMITTED TO PRESENT A PETITION TO OFFICIALS IN THE CASA ROSADA REPORTEDLY SIGNED BY
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37,500 PERSONS. THE SIMPLE PETITION ASKED THE GOVERN-

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MENT FOR INFORMATION ABOUT THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE DISAPPEARED, BETTER TREATMENT FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, AND THE FREEING OF ALL PEN PRISONERS CURRENTLY BEING HELD WITHOUT CRIMINAL CHARGES.

2. THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAY AND THE OTHER HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS WHO GATHERED IN THE PLAZA HELD AN EMOTIONAL TWO-HOUR DEMONSTRATION. THE MOTHERS FOR THE FIRST TIME BEGAN CHANTING "NOS DIGA DONDE ESTAN." (TELL US WHERE THEY ARE.) AS THEY CIRCLED AROUND THE PLAZA DE MAYO IN THE AFTERNOON'S HEAT. ALTHOUGH A LARGE NUMBER OF PLAINCLOTHES POLICEMEN WERE IN EVIDENCE THERE WERE ONLY MINOR REPORTS OF HASSLING.

3. ABOUT AN HOUR AFTER THE DEMONSTRATION BEGAN, A GROUP OF APPROXIMATELY 300 PERSONS MOVED FROM THE PLAZA TO THE ENTRANCE OF THE CASA ROSADA AND DEMANDED ENTRY. A PERSON WHO IS SAID TO HAVE IDENTIFIED HIMSELF AS THE CHIEF OF SECURITY OF THE CASA ROSADA SAID THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO TALK WITH A SMALL DELEGATION OF THE PROTESTERS. SIX OF THE MOTHERS AND ONE MAN WERE ADMITTED AND REAPPEARED A HALF AN HOUR LATER TO INFORM THE DEMONSTRATORS THAT THE CASA ROSADA SPOKESMAN HAD MADE THREE SIGNIFICANT PROMISES:
A) A CHRISTMAS AMNESTY LIST OF SEVERAL HUNDRED PEN PRISONERS WOULD BE ANNOUNCED BY SATURDAY, DECEMBER 23. FURTHERMORE THESE INDIVIDUALS WOULD BE ACTUALLY FREED AND NOT JUST HAVE THEIR PEN STATUS REMOVED. (SEE SEPTEL.)
B) THOSE PERSONS WHO HAVE BEEN SENTENCED BY MILITARY TRIBUNALS WOULD BE NAMED BY THE GOVERNMENT AND WOULD HAVE THEIR SENTENCES REDUCED BY TWO-THIRDS.
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C) IF THE DELEGATION WOULD RETURN ON THE FOLLOWING THURSDAY, THE GOVERNMENT WOULD REPLY REGARDING THE PERSONS INQUIRED ABOUT IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS' PETITION. ACCORDING TO A PRESS ACCOUNT IN THE BUENOS AIRES HERALD, THE SPOKESMAN NOTED THAT ONE SHOULD NOT TALK OF THE DISAPPEARED AS THERE ARE ONLY PEOPLE UNDER CIVIL AND MILITARY JUSTICE.

4. AMBASSADOR CASTRO IN THURSDAY MORNING MEETING (12/21) MENTIONED RUMORS TO GENERAL VIOLA THAT A LARGE

SCALE POLICE ACTION WAS PLANNED AGAINST THE MOTHERS IN THE PLAZA DE MAYO THAT AFTERNOON. GENERAL VIOLA EXPRESSED SURPRISE AND NOTED THAT THE TIMING FOR SUCH AN ACTION AGAINST THE MOTHERS WITH THE BEAGLE PROBLEM COMING TO A HEAD WAS POOR. IN THE PRESENCE OF THE AMBASSADOR, HE CALLED IN ARMY SECRETARY GENERAL BIGNONE AND ORDERED THAT NO ACTION BE TAKEN AGAINST THE MOTHERS' DEMONSTRATION THAT AFTERNOON.

6. EMBASSY COMMENT: THURSDAY'S EVENTS WERE SIGNIFICANT. THE DEMONSTRATION WAS THE LARGEST AND MOST VOCAL HELD IN THE PLAZA SINCE THE DISAPPEARANCE LAST DECEMBER OF SEVERAL MEMBERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO LEADERSHIP. SECONDLY,

TWO DELEGATIONS WERE ADMITTED INTO CASA ROSADA AND A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN MADE SUBSTANTIAL PROMISES TO THE DEMONSTRATORS.

7. SINCE THE INTERNATIONAL FLAP CAUSED BY THE NOVEMBER 1977 BRIEF ARREST OF SOME 300 MOTHERS AND THE MID-DECEMBER DISAPPEARANCE OF 13 OF THE MOTHERS' GROUP, THE ATTITUDE OF THE GOA TOWARDS THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT HERE HAS BEEN ONE OF CAREFUL SCRUTINY AND BENIGN NEGLECT. THE DECEMBER 21ST ACTIONS WERE A DEFINITE DEPARTURE. WHETHER THOSE ACTIONS WERE PREMEDITATED OR TAKEN ON AN AD HOC BASIS BY SECURITY OPERATIVES
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TO DEFUSE THE LARGE AND AGITATED DEMONSTRATION WE DO NOT KNOW. HOWEVER, THE ACTION WAS SIGNIFICANT AND IS ENCOURAGING MORE VISIBLE ACTIONS BY HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS HERE.
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